

Honorificity feature as an enabler: Bridging the person gap

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This paper examines differential argument marking in the Darbhanga variety of Maithili. In this language, whereas all 1st and 2nd person subjects trigger obligatory verbal (person and/or honorificity) agreement, 3rd person subjects must be honorific to trigger agreement. 3rd person non-honorific subjects fail to do so. Differential subject marking, we claim, is the result of the Hon(orificity) feature on 3rd person DPs that are otherwise, conventionally, characterised as person-less nominals. The Hon feature enables 3rd person subjects to be morphosyntactically encoded at par with 1st and 2nd person subjects. In the object domain, honorificity plays an even more decisive role, where its presence is mandatory for all (1st/2nd/3rd) objects to trigger agreement. More specifically, only 2nd person and 3rd person objects with an Hon feature trigger agreement; 1st person and 3rd person objects that do not have the Hon feature fail to agree. We claim that differential object marking also results from a licensing requirement of the honorificity feature. We show that Maithili differential argument marking – the result of honorificity licensing – proceeds along the same lines as animacy/specificity/definiteness feature licensing, as proposed in Kalin (2018).

KEYWORDS: Maithili, honorificity feature, differential argument marking, animacy, definiteness.

1. Introduction

A robust cross-linguistic observation is that 3rd person DPs behave differently from 1st and 2nd person DPs with respect to case and agreement (Harley & Ritter 2002, Bejar & Rezac 2003, Anagnostopoulou 2005, Adger & Harbour 2007). The literature, however, also notes differences among 3rd person DPs,

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based on their features (cf. Nevins 2007 and Ackema & Neeleman 2018). For example, animate and definite 3rd person DPs in Spanish Leista dialects pattern closely with 1st and 2nd person DPs by participating in operations that otherwise do not apply to their inanimate and indefinite counterparts (Ormazabal & Romero 2007).¹ In other words, animacy and definite features bridge the gap between 1st/2nd and 3rd person pronouns by allowing the latter to have similar morphosyntactic properties as the former. Similar roles played by animate and definite features are also noted in cases of Differential Argument Marking (**DAM**), which includes Differential Subject Marking (**DSM**) as well as Differential Object Marking (**DOM**), such that only animate/definite/specific subjects or objects are marked for case or agreement. Inanimate or indefinite 3rd person subjects/objects remain unmarked (Silverstein 1976, Moravcsik 1978, Comrie 1979, Croft 1988, Bossong 1991, Enç 1991, de Hoop 1996, Torrego 1998, Woolford 1999, Aissen 2003, Kalin 2014, 2018, Witzlack-Makarevich & Seržant 2018, Levin 2019 among others).

In this paper, we introduce another feature to this group – the honorificity/Hon feature. With novel data from the Darbhanga dialect of the Eastern Indo-Aryan language, Maithili, spoken in the state of Bihar (India), we show that 3rd person subject DPs trigger agreement only when they are honorific. 3rd person non-honorific subjects fail to control verbal agreement because they lack the Hon feature. The Hon feature similarly plays an important role in differential object marking: only 2nd person and 3rd person honorific objects trigger agreement. 1st person objects and 3rd person non-honorific objects that do not carry an Hon feature are unable to control agreement.

We explain Maithili DAM with the nominal licensing mechanism proposed by Kalin (2018). In Kalin's account, differential marking is the result of a DP receiving case/agreement from an 'optional' functional head in the structure. This licensing is exceptional (see Kalin 2014 and Levin 2019) because it follows a prior round of licensing of DPs with an obligatory functional head. With some minimum and necessary adjustments, we extend this mechanism to Maithili and argue that 3rd person subjects, being [-person], fail to agree with the [person] feature on T. Instead, when these subjects carry the Hon feature, they undergo exceptional licensing by the honorificity feature on the same head, resulting in 3rd person-triggered subject honorificity agreement. This yields Maithili DSM effects; such exceptional licensing is impossible with 3rd person non-honorific DPs due to their lack of the Hon feature. Objects with the Hon feature undergo a similar process: their Hon feature is licensed against a second probe on T, bearing Hon. This results in DOM, with only honorificity carrying (2nd and 3rd person) objects triggering agreement.

The paper is divided into the following sections. In section 2, we summarise observations about the 1st/2nd person versus 3rd person divide that has been reported in the literature. Section 3 presents the Maithili DAM pat-

terns. In section 4, we provide an outline of Kalin's (2018) licensing account, along with relevant illustrations of Senaya DOM. In section 5, we extend Kalin's account to explain the DSM and the DOM patterns in Maithili, while simultaneously highlighting some non-trivial differences between Senaya and Maithili. Section 6 presents some dialectal differences between the Dharbanga dialect, the Siraha dialect, and the Janakpur dialect of Maithili, the latter two spoken in Nepal. Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. The enabling features: animacy, specificity and definiteness

A fundamental divide between the 1st/2nd person and the 3rd person is that the former are always animate and definite, whereas the latter can be inanimate, specific, and indefinite. These differences also manifest morphologically in languages. However, recent literature also reports instances where the divide between the 1st/2nd and 3rd person is bridged with help from features such as animacy, specificity, and definiteness. More specifically, an animate, specific, or definite 3rd person DP – in contrast to an inanimate, non-specific, indefinite 3rd person pronoun – behaves like 1st and 2nd person pronouns. One such instance is reported from Spanish.

The Leista dialect of Spanish has two 3rd person pronouns, *le* for the animate and *lo* for the inanimate. The animate pronoun *le* cannot appear in the accusative position in the presence of a 1st/2nd person dative pronoun – (1a). By contrast, the inanimate pronoun *lo* has no such restriction and it can easily occur in the accusative position in the same configuration – (1b).²

- (1) a. **Te le di*
2.DAT 3.ACC gave
'I gave him to you'
b. *Te lo di*
2.DAT 3.ACC gave
'I gave it to you' (Ormazabal & Romero 2007: 321)

Ormazabal & Romero (2007) explain the unacceptability of (1a) as resulting from the animate 3rd person pronoun *le* being unlicensed in the presence of the higher dative object. Licensing amounts to getting a case from an appropriate head in this example. The structurally higher placed dative object *te* in (1a), according to them, blocks the animate accusative object *le* from getting case. This restriction, however, does not apply for the inanimate *lo* in the Leista dialect, as it does not need licensing (1b) due to being inanimate.

In contrast, Standard Spanish has only one form, *lo*, for both animate 'him' and inanimate 3rd person 'it'. There is no licensing requirement on *lo*, and it appears in the presence of a 2nd person dative DP (2).

- (2) *Pedro te lo envía*
 Peter 2.DAT 3.ACC send.3.SBJ
 'Peter sends it/him to you' (Ormazabal & Romero 2007: 316)

The difference between the Leista dialect example in (1a) and the Standard Spanish example in (2) is that only the former has an animacy feature partitioning 3rd person pronouns. The animacy feature brings the 3rd person animate pronoun *le* within the ambit of the Person Case Constraint (PCC), which is generally only observed for 1st/2nd person pronouns. PCC captures the inability of certain accusative-marked direct objects (DO) to co-occur with dative-marked indirect objects (IO) in ditransitive constructions (Perlmutter 1971, Bonnet 1994). An example from Standard Spanish is given below in (3).³

- (3) **Pedro te me envía*
 Peter 2.DAT 1.ACC send.3.SBJ
 'Peter sends me to you' (Ormazabal & Romero 2007: 316)

The above-mentioned differences between Standard Spanish and the Leista dialect result from differential feature selection between the closely related varieties. Animacy is a relevant feature dividing the 3rd person in the Leista dialect, but not for the Standard Spanish variety.

Another example of a language using the animacy feature to differentiate between 3rd person DPs is KiRimi (Bantu). In KiRimi, 3rd person objects trigger verbal agreement only when they are animate (Hualde 1989; Woolford 2000). Consider (4a), where the 3rd person animate object triggers obligatory object agreement (*-mU*) on the verb. In contrast, the inanimate object in (4b) fails to trigger agreement. KiRimi object agreement has also been considered a case of animacy feature licensing, where only animate objects trigger agreement.

- (4) a. *N -a -(mU)-on-aa Maria*
 1.SBJ -TNS -OM-saw Maria
 'I saw Maria'
 b. *N -a (*mu)-on-aa kitabu*
 1.SBJ -TNS -OM-saw book
 'I saw a book' (Ormazabal & Romero 2007: 322)

Like animacy, specificity/definiteness has also been reported as features that differentiate between 3rd person DPs, resulting in the phenomenon of Differential Object Marking (DOM). DOM is a strategy for categorising objects into those that are morphologically marked via either case, agreement, adposition, or clitic doubling and those that are unmarked (Comrie 1979, 1981; Croft 1988, 1990; Bossong 1991; Enç 1991; De Hoop 1996; Torrego

1998; Woolford 1999; Aissen 2003; Danon 2006; De Swart 2007; Rodríguez-Mondoñedo 2007; Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011; Lopez 2012, Kalin 2018 among others).⁴ We present an example of specificity-based DOM from Hindi (5a) where only the specific 3rd person object is marked with the case *-ko* (Bhatt 2007). The non-specific 3rd person object is left unmarked – (5b).

- (5) a. *Mina ek bacce*(-ko) uthaa rahii hai*
 Mina.F a child-DAT lift PROG.F be.PRS.3SG
 ‘Mina is picking up a (particular) child.’
 b. *Mina ek bacca uthaa rahii hai*
 Mina.F a child lift PROG.F be.PRS.3SG
 ‘Mina is picking up a (nonspecific) child.’ (Bhatt 2007: 2)

Since all pronouns, irrespective of their person values, and proper nouns are always specific, they are obligatorily marked with the accusative case *-ko* in Hindi, as shown in (6a-b).

- (6) a. *Mina mujh/tum/us*(-ko) dekh rahii thii*
 Mina.F I/you/(s)he-DAT see PROG.F be.PST.SG.F
 ‘Mina was looking at me/you/him/her.’
 b. *Mina Tina*(-ko) dekh rahii thii*
 Mina.F Tina-DAT see PROG.F be.PST.SG.F
 ‘Mina was looking at Tina.’ (Bhatt 2007: 2)

Another example comes from Hungarian, where only definite 3rd person objects trigger agreement on the verb, whereas indefinite 3rd person objects do not – (7a-b), respectively.

- (7) a. *Én lát-om a kutyá-t*
 I see-1SG.OBJ the dog-ACC
 ‘I see the dog.’
 b. *Én lát-ok egy kutyá-t*
 I see-1SG.SBJ a dog-ACC
 ‘I see a dog.’ (Bárány 2017: 1)

Apart from animacy/specificity/definiteness, features such as number, referentiality, affectedness, topicality, focus, etc., have also been reported to give rise to differential argument-marking effects (*ibid.*). In short, what this section has shown is that features such as animacy, specificity, and definiteness make 3rd person licensing mandatory, where licensing can be either via case assignment or agreement. With this brief background information, we now present data from Maithili where the Hon feature of 3rd person pronouns enables them to get licensed via agreement in both the subject and object positions.

3. Honorificity feature as an enabler in Maithili

In this section, we present novel data from Darbhanga Maithili to show that honorificity joins the list of features discussed in §2, as it enables 3rd person agreement in both subject and object positions. Before we present the relevant examples, we would like to mention that we consider honorificity (Hon) to be a syntactic feature in Maithili, as it is one of the main drivers of the Maithili agreement system (we elaborate on the nature of the Hon feature in Maithili in §4.1). This is true not only for Maithili but also for other Eastern Indo-Aryan (EIA) languages such as Magahi (Alok 2020, 2021) and Bangla (Kumari 2023). Honorificity has also been proposed to be a syntactic feature in Korean (Portner *et al.* 2019) and Japanese (Boeckx & Niinuma 2004, Miyagawa 2012, 2017, 2022).⁵ To define the properties of Maithili pronouns and agreement, we use the term honorificity for the feature and define its values as honorific, mid-honorific, and non-honorific, following the literature in Maithili, such as Yadav (1996), Stump & Yadav (1998) and Bickel *et al.* (1999).⁶

3.1. Third person subject agreement

The 3rd person + human DPs in Maithili can be categorised as honorific and non-honorific. The pronoun for both values is *o*. However, verbal agreement is distinctly marked, with only the 3rd person honorific DP triggering agreement on the verb (8a). The 3rd person non-honorific DP, on the other hand, triggers ‘DEFAULT’ agreement (8b). A crucial property of the Maithili agreement system is that all features that trigger agreement are fused and get realised as a portmanteau morpheme. Not just the features of one agreement controller, i.e. the subject, but even multiple agreement controllers, i.e. subject + object, are realised as a portmanteau morpheme, as we show later with transitive verbs in §3.2.⁷

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| (8) | a. | <i>o</i> | <i>sut-əl</i> | <i>chh-əl-khinh</i> |
| | | s/he.H | sleep-PRF | be-PST-3.H |
| | | ‘S/he(H) had slept’ | | |
| | b. | <i>o</i> | <i>sut-əl</i> | <i>chh-əl-ai</i> |
| | | s/he.NH | sleep-PRF | be-PST-DEFAULT |
| | | ‘S/he(NH) had slept’ | | |

The reason for terming the 3rd person non-honorific agreement marker *-ai* ‘DEFAULT’ is that Maithili uses this morpheme in all instances where the DPs fail to trigger agreement on the verb. It is an elsewhere morpheme that does not indicate a distinct feature. Consider (9) and (10), with 1st person

dative and instrumental case-marked subjects, respectively. In both instances, the verb carries the default *əi* morpheme.⁸

- (9) *həm-ra chhinke-l-əi*
 I-DAT sneeze-PRF-DEFAULT
 'I sneezed' (lit.: 'Sneeze happened to me')
- (10) *hum-ra-sa bilai-ke dekh-əl nai ge-l-əi*
 I-OBL-INS cat-ACC see-PRF no go-PST-DEFAULT
 'I was unable to watch the cat' (context: because the cat was suffering)

When we replace the marked subjects with unmarked (nominative) 1st person subjects, as in (11) and (12), the verbs show obligatory 1st person agreement *-iəi*. The difference between the dative 1st person subjects in (9-10) and the nominative 1st person subjects in (11-12) is that only the former carry a morphological case, which prevents them from controlling verbal agreement. In all such instances where agreement fails, the default morpheme shows up.

- (11) *həm chhink-əl-iəi*
 I.NOM sneeze-PRF-1
 'I sneezed (deliberately)'
- (12) *hum bilai-ke jainbuijh-k nai dekh-əl-iəi*
 I.NOM cat-ACC knowingly no see-PRF-1
 'I knowingly did not see the cat'

As further evidence that the honorific value enables 3rd person DPs to trigger agreement, we present sentences with inanimate 3rd person DPs. Inanimate nouns always trigger the default marker *-əi*, as illustrated in (13) with the noun 'statue'. However, when bearing an honorific meaning, as with 'god's statue' (14), inanimate nouns trigger the same agreement on the verb as the 3rd person + human honorific subjects – compare (14) with (8a).

- (13) *murti tooit ge-l-əi*
 statue break go-PRF-DEFAULT
 'The statue(NH) broke'
- (14) *bhagban-ke murti tooit ge-l-khinh*
 God-GEN statue break go-PRF-3.H
 'God's statue(H) broke'

An anonymous reviewer points out that the agreement in (14) might also be because of animacy and not necessarily honorificity, because 'the statue of a God' gets personified as an animate entity. While we concur with the

reviewer that personification is an important factor in the language, we also claim that personification is not a sufficient condition for honorificity agreement. As for instance, in (15), an inanimate noun like ‘God’s trident’ fails to trigger honorificity agreement on the verb, despite being personified. The difference between ‘God’s statue’ and ‘God’s trident’ is that only the former gets an honorific value.

- (15) *bhagban-ke trishul aaib-ka rakshas-ke mair de-l-k-ai/*khinh*
 God-GEN trident came-PRT demon-ACC kill give-PRF-TRN-DEFAULT/3.H
 ‘God’s trident came and killed the demon’

Personification alone does not trigger 3rd person honorific agreement because, as we have already shown in (8b), non-honorific humans do not trigger agreement. This is a strong indication that honorificity is crucial for agreement. Second, if animacy/personification was the driving factor behind honorificity agreement, we should not get a default agreement with nouns like ‘cow’. As we show in (16), animate non-humans also trigger default agreement, thus also ruling out animacy as the feature that results in 3rd person honorific agreement. Therefore, the presence of default agreement morphology with human non-honorific subjects and non-human animate subjects shows that in the case of 3rd person, it is the ‘honorific’ value that gives honorificity agreement and not just animacy or personification.

- (16) *gya sut-əl-ai*
 cow sleep-PRF-DEFAULT
 ‘The cow(NH) slept’

Unlike what is observed with 3rd person DPs above, honorificity does not determine whether 1st and 2nd person subjects trigger agreement. 1st person in Maithili does not encode honorificity distinction, and yet 1st person subjects trigger obligatory person agreement, as shown in (17).

- (17) *həm sut-əl chh-əl-i-ai*
 I sleep-PRF be-PST-1
 ‘I had slept’

The 2nd person is divided into three levels: non-honorific (NH), mid-honorific (MH), and honorific (H), and all three values are distinctly encoded on the verb as well – (18a-c). The non-honorific pronoun is used for an addressee who is younger than the speaker in age and/or in social hierarchy, such as a younger sibling. The mid-honorific pronoun is used for an addressee who is younger in relation. For instance, an elder brother might use the non-honorific pronoun for his younger brother when they are both young, but as they both grow up, the elder brother eventually switches to the mid-honorific pronoun.⁹

Finally, the honorific pronoun is used for socially senior addressees such as parents, teachers, or anyone older than the speaker. The corresponding verbal agreement with these addressees is shown in (18).¹⁰

- (18) a. *tō sut-əl chh-əl-æ*
 you.NH sleep-PRF be-PST-2.NH
 ‘You(NH) had slept’
 b. *tō sut-əl chh-əl-əh*
 you.MH sleep-PRF be-PST-2.MH
 ‘You(MH) had slept’
 c. *əhā sut-əl chh-əl-əūh*
 you.H sleep-PRF be-PST-2.H
 ‘You(H) had slept’

Note that, unlike the 3rd person non-honorific, the 2nd person non-honorific pronoun is distinctly marked on the verb as the morpheme *-æ*, and not as the default agreement morpheme *-əl*. Thus, it becomes clear that not all non-honorific values are syntactically default. The non-honorific is expressed through a default in the context of 3rd person, but not in the context of 2nd person.

In Table 1, we present all relevant cases of subject agreement in the past tense.¹¹ As the table shows, 1st person agreement is only for person and there is no honorificity. The 2nd person triggers both person and honorificity agreement. In the 3rd person, however, only the honorific pronoun triggers agreement.¹²

PRONOUNS	AGREEMENT	FEATURES
1	✓	person
2.NH	✓	person, honorificity
2.MH	✓	person, honorificity
2.H	✓	person, honorificity
3.NH	✗	default
3.H	✓	honorificity

Table 1. Maithili Subject Agreement Patterns.

3.2. Third person object agreement

The divide between the 3rd person honorific and non-honorific DPs continues into the object domain as well. While 3rd person honorific objects trig-

ger honorificity agreement, 3rd person non-honorific objects fail to trigger any agreement. In (19a), the 1st person subject and the 3rd person honorific object together mark the verb with *-iāinh*. When the object is 3rd person non-honorific, as in (19b), verbal morphology is replaced with only 1st person agreement morpheme *-iāi* – compare (19b) with (17).

- (19) a. *hām hun-ka dekh-ne chh-əl-iāinh*
 I s/he.H-ACC see-PRF be-PST-1 + 3.H
 ‘I saw her/him(H)’
 b. *hām ok-ra dekh-ne chh-əl-iāi*
 I s/he.NH-ACC see-PRF be-PST-1
 ‘I saw her/him(NH)’

Like 3rd person honorific objects, all 2nd person objects also trigger agreement, as shown in (20a-c), where the subject is 1st person and the object is 2nd person; and (21a-c), where the subject is 3rd person honorific, and the object is 2nd person.

- (20) a. *hām to-ra dekh-ne chh-əl-iāu*
 I you.NH-ACC see-PRF be-PST-1 + 2.NH
 ‘I saw you(NH)’
 b. *hām to-ra dekh-ne chh-əl-iāh*
 I you.MH-ACC see-PRF be-PST-1 + 2.MH
 ‘I saw you(MH)’
 c. *hām āhā-ke dekh-ne chh-əl-āiḥ*
 I you.H-ACC see-PRF be-PST-1 + 2.H
 ‘I saw you(H)’
 (21) a. *o to-ra dekh-ne chh-əl-khūnh*
 s/he.H you.NH-ACC see-PRF be-PST-3.H + 2.NH
 ‘s/he(H) saw you(NH)’
 b. *o to-ra dekh-ne chh-əl-āhnh*
 s/he.H you.MH-ACC see-PRF be-PST-3.H + 2.MH
 ‘s/he(H) saw you(MH)’
 c. *o āhā-ke dekh-ne chh-əl-āinh*
 s/he.H you.H-ACC see-PRF be-PST-3.H + 2.H
 ‘s/he(H) saw you(H)’

What differentiates the object domain from the subject domain in Maithili is that 1st person objects fail to trigger agreement. Recall that 1st person pronouns are not marked for honorificity, and they trigger only person agreement as subjects. In the object position, however, 1st person DPs fail to trigger even person agreement. This is illustrated in (22): when co-occurring with a 1st person object, the verb is marked with *-khinh*, encoding only the 3rd person honorific values of the subject. This is the same agreement

morphology that a 3rd person subject triggers in an intransitive sentence, as shown in (23), repeated from (8a). In short, there is no 1st person object agreement.

- (22) *o hām-ra dekh-ne chh-əl-khinh*
 s/he.H I-ACC see-PRF be-PST-3.H
 ‘s/he(H) saw me’

- (23) *o sut-əl chh-əl-khinh*
 s/he.H sleep-PRF be-PST-3.H
 ‘S/he(H) had slept’

In summary, Maithili has an additional restriction in the object domain: object DPs, which are not specified for honorificity, fail to trigger verbal agreement. While the DSM effect only applies to the 3rd person subjects, the DOM effect applies to all objects. We summarise the object agreement patterns in Table 2.

PRONOUNS	AGREEMENT	FEATURES
1	✗	-
2.NH	✓	person, honorificity
2.MH	✓	person, honorificity
2.H	✓	person, honorificity
3.NH	✗	-
3.H	✓	honorificity

Table 2. Maithili Object Agreement Pattern.

We present an analysis of the Maithili differential argument markings in §4.

4. Theoretical framework: Kalin (2018)

Our analysis of Maithili DAM is based on the feature licensing account of Kalin (2018), with some necessary modifications. In this section, we present a brief outline of her account.

Kalin (2018) presents an account of DOM (case and/or agreement), where the differential pattern arises due to two factors: “(i) which nominals require licensing in a particular language, and (ii) which nominal licensers are obliga-

tory (always merge) and which nominal licensers are optional (do not always merge) in a particular language” (Kalin 2018: 126).¹³ The obligatory licensing head licenses its closest nominal, i.e. a nominal in either its specifier position or in its c-command domain. Obligatory licensing happens irrespective of the feature of the nominal. In this first round of licensing, no differential pattern arises. In contrast, the optional licensing head licenses the remaining nominals that need licensing for features such as specificity, definiteness, or animacy. This optional licensing gives rise to the differential agreement pattern, as licensing is contingent on features. Kalin (2014) and Levin (2019) refer to the differential agreement marking that arises in this kind of licensing as exceptional.

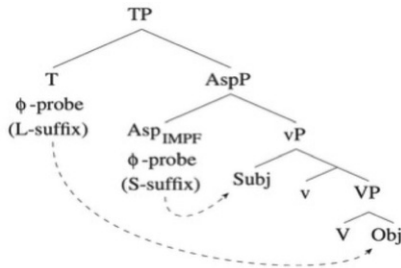
Kalin (2018) demonstrates the mechanism of exceptional licensing with instances of differential object agreement in Senaya. In Senaya, only specific objects trigger agreement only in the imperfective aspect. This can be seen in (24) – an imperfective sentence – where the subject and the specific object both trigger agreement. By contrast, the non-specific object fails to trigger agreement in the imperfective sentence given in (25).¹⁴

- (24) *Āna (xa) ksūta xazy-an-ā*
I a book.F see.IMPF-S.1SG.F-L.3SG.F
‘I see a (specific) book (e.g. on the table).’ (Kalin 2018: 10a)

- (25) *Āna (xa) ksūta kasw-an*
I a book.F write.IMPF-S.1SG.F
‘I will write a book (e.g. someday, about something, I don’t know what).’
(Kalin 2018: 11a)

Kalin proposes the following mechanism explaining the DOM patterns in Senaya. In the imperfective sentence (24), there are two potential loci for agreement: the imperfective Asp head and the T head. Since Asp is the closest head to the subject, subject-Asp agreement occurs, as shown in (26) below. It is only after the subject has agreed that the object with a specificity feature agrees with the T head, resulting in differential object agreement.

(26)



(Kalin 2018: 39)

In (26), the Asp head is the obligatory licenser, and the T head is the optional licenser, as it only hosts agreement in structures that include specific objects. By contrast, T is not the optional licenser for the non-specific object in sentence (25), which explains the structural differences between specific and non-specific objects in Senaya.

Kalin also opines that subjects generally do not undergo optional licensing because they are structurally higher than objects, which makes them the most local goals to the obligatory licensors. Subjects, therefore, are not fundamentally different from objects; they are simply closer to the obligatory operations. However, Kalin (2018) does not provide an account of DSM cases.

In the sections below, we extend Kalin's licensing approach to both DSM and DOM patterns in Maithili, albeit with some modifications.

5. Analysis: on exceptional licensing in Maithili

There are two differences between Senaya and Maithili that motivate us to make some necessary changes to Kalin's mechanisms, before applying them to Maithili data. The first difference is that, unlike Senaya, which exhibits only DOM, Maithili exhibits both DSM and DOM effects. This means that in Maithili, even subject agreement is feature-sensitive, in that some features must get licensed. Specifically, we observe that Maithili subjects that carry a person feature trigger person agreement, i.e. they are licensed by the person feature on a probe. This explains why all subjects with person values, namely 1st and 2nd person subjects, trigger obligatory agreement. In the 3rd person domain, where we see DSM effects, only honorific DPs trigger agreement, i.e. they are licensed by the Hon feature on a probe; non-honorific subjects fail to do so. DSM effects, we thus claim, are due to the optional licensing of the 3rd person subjects.

The Hon feature is responsible for Maithili DOM effect too. Only Hon carrying objects agree with the optional licenser after subject licensing takes place. This exceptional licensing of the Hon feature results in Hon agreement with 2nd person and 3rd person honorific objects; 1st person objects that do not carry the Hon feature fail for obvious reasons.

The second difference is that in Maithili, there is a T head that serves as a probe for both DSM and DOM. As we show below, subject and object agreement are spelled out as a portmanteau morpheme on T. We take this as evidence that T has two probes, one for each DP. To elaborate, following the Multiple Agree account of Georgi (2012, 2013), we posit two probes on the T head: the first probe, ϕ_1 , agrees with the subject, and the second probe, ϕ_2 , agrees with the object. Each probe has different featural specifications that account for the differences between subject and object agreement patterns.¹⁵

The details of subject and object licensing are presented in §5.1 and §5.2, respectively.

5.1. Explaining subject agreement

Recall that subjects in Maithili trigger agreement for either person or honorificity or both, except for 3rd person non-honorific subjects. Specifically, 1st person subjects trigger only person agreement, 2nd person subjects trigger both person and honorificity agreement, and 3rd person honorific subjects trigger honorificity agreement. 3rd person non-honorific subjects trigger no agreement. Let us now analyse the locus of this agreement and the mechanisms underlying DSM in some detail.

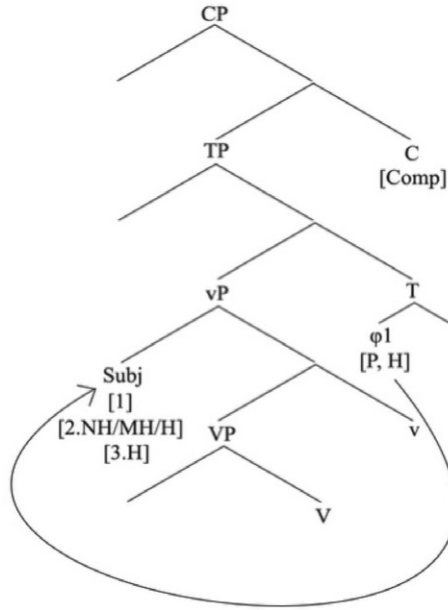
Consider the sentence shown in (27a), with a 1st person subject, repeated from (17). The morphological order (verb-aspect-auxiliary-tense-person) suggests that the T head is the locus of subject agreement in the language. This assumption gains further support from the fact that the subject agreement morpheme cannot appear on heads that are below the tense marker or above it. We illustrate the impossibility of attaching the subject agreement marker on the verb with (27b), the aspect marker with (28b), or the focus marker with (29b). The grammatical counterparts are given in the (a) examples, where the agreement morpheme is always on T.

- (27) a. *həm sut-əl chh-əl-iəi*
 I sleep-PRF be-PST-1
 ‘I had slept’
 b. **həm sut-iəi chh-əl*
 I sleep-1 be-PST
 ‘I had slept’
- (28) a. *həm suit rəh-əl chh-əl-iəi*
 I sleep PROG-PRF be-PST-1
 ‘I was sleeping’
 b. **həm suit rəh-əl-iəi chh-əl*
 I sleep PROG-PRF-1 be-PST
 ‘I was sleeping’
- (29) a. *həm sut-əl chh-əl-iəi he ki keu aaib ge-l-əi*
 I sleep-PRF be-PST-1 FOC COMP someone come go-PRF-DEFAULT
 ‘I had just slept when someone came’
 b. **həm sut-əl chh-əl he-iəi ki keu aaib ge-l-əi*
 I sleep-PRF be-PST FOC-1 COMP someone come go-PRF-DEFAULT
 ‘I had just slept when someone came’

From the data provided above, and from the surface position of agreement morphemes presented for all subjects in §3.1, we take T to be the locus

of subject agreement. In more specific terms, we claim that T has a probe, $\phi 1$, which has an uninterpretable person feature and an uninterpretable honorificity feature, and one or both features may be valued in a derivation. There is no derivational crash when one of the features remains unvalued, an idea we adopt from Preminger (2014). The agreement mechanism is shown in (30).

(30)



The closest nominal to the T head is the subject. When T probes down, its person and/or honorificity features are matched against the features of the subject, leading to subject agreement. Subject agreement in Maithili is dependent on two features: person and honorificity. A 3rd person subject agrees only with the probe when it has an honorific feature. Therefore, while 1st and 2nd person subjects agree obligatorily with T in person, 3rd person subjects agree optionally – in only those instances where there is an honorificity feature that demands licensing. 3rd person subject-triggered honorificity agreement is ‘exceptional’ in the sense that the concerned subject is rendered eligible for agreement due to the honorificity feature.

Below, we list features that are present for each subject nominal and the values attributed to the probe $\phi 1$ on T in each instance of agreement. The valued features on $\phi 1$ are shown in *italics*, and the agreement morpheme is shown on the extreme right. The absence of person and honorificity agreement with 3rd person non-honorific subjects yields the morphological default *ai*.

- (31) a. 1[person] → T φ 1 [person, Hon] → *iəi*
 b. 2.NH[person, Hon] → T φ 1 [person, Hon] → *æ*
 c. 2.MH[person, Hon] → T φ 1 [person, Hon] → *əh*
 d. 2.H[person, Hon] → T φ 1 [person, Hon] → *əũh*
 e. 3.NH[default] → T φ 1 [person, Hon] → *əi*
 f. 3.H[Hon] → T φ 1 [person, Hon] → *khinh*

5.2. Explaining object agreement

In the object domain, in addition to 3rd person non-honorific, 1st person objects also do not trigger verbal agreement. Since only 2nd person DPs and 3rd person honorific DPs trigger object agreement, we can draw a parallel to the DOM case mentioned in §2 and §4, where only animate/specific/definite DPs trigger object agreement.

In Maithili, subject and object agreement markers appear obligatorily on T (32a) and (33a). These never appear on the lexical verb (32b) or other heads, including the focus head (33b). Based on this, we conclude that the licensing head for objects in Maithili is also the T head.

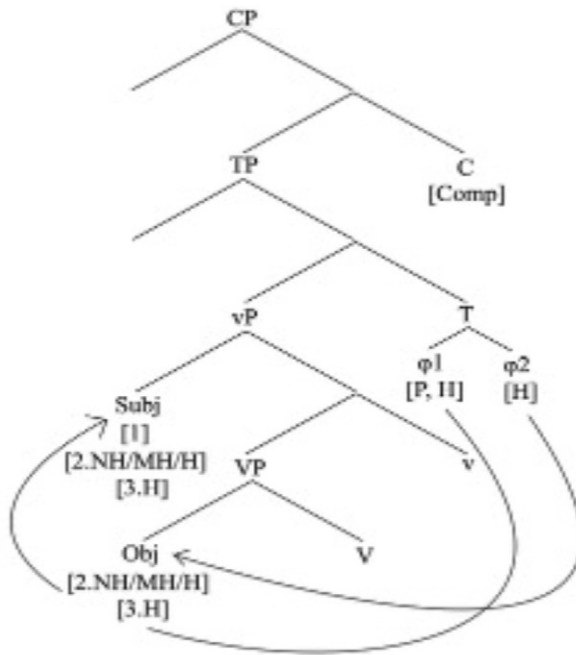
- (32) a. *həm hun-ka dekh-ne chh-əl-iəinh*
 I s/he.H-ACC see-PRF be-PST-1 + 3.H
 ‘I had seen her/him(H)’
 b. **həm hun-ka dekh-ne-iəinh chh-əl*
 I s/he.H-ACC see-PRF-1 + 3.H be-PST
 ‘I had seen her/him(H)’
- (33) a. *həm hun-ka dekh-ne chh-əl-iəinh he ki o bila ge-l-khinh*
 I s/he.H-ACC see-PRF be-PST-1 + 3.H FOC COMP s/he.H vanish go-PST-3.H
 ‘As soon as I had seen her/him(H), he(H) vanished’
 b. **həmhun-ka dekh-ne chh-əl he-iəinh ki o bila ge-l-khinh*
 I s/he.H-ACC see-PRF be-PST FOC-1 + 3.H COMP s/he.H vanish go-PST-3.H
 ‘As soon as I had seen her/him(H), he(H) vanished’

In short, T is the locus for both subject and object agreement. The difference is that while subject agreement and DSM effects result from agreement with the first probe φ 1 on T carrying [person, honorificity], it is the second probe φ 2 [honorificity] on T that is responsible for DOM effects. The T and object relations are shown in (34).¹⁶

- (34) a. 1[person] → T φ 2 [Hon]
 b. 2.NH[person, Hon] → T φ 2 [Hon]
 c. 2.MH[person, Hon] → T φ 2 [Hon]
 d. 2.H[person, Hon] → T φ 2 [Hon]
 e. 3.NH[default] → T φ 2 [Hon]
 f. 3.H[Hon] → T φ 2 [Hon]

The question now arises: how do we ensure that the two probes on T trigger agreement with the right DPs? In other words, what makes $\phi 1$ agree with the subject and $\phi 2$ agree with the object? Following Georgi (2012, 2013), we deploy a multiple agree account for Maithili such that the first probe $\phi 1$ on T agrees with the subject and the second probe $\phi 2$ on T agrees with the object. The probes trigger agreement in a cyclic manner, where the first probe searches for the goal and first finds the subject, triggering subject agreement. The second probe then searches for the object and triggers object agreement. Since the second probe only searches for the Hon feature, it triggers agreement with objects that carry an Hon feature, namely the 2nd person and 3rd person objects. Since the 3rd person non-honorific is default, it does not trigger object agreement. The absence of the honorificity feature on 1st person objects explains why these objects, too, fail to trigger agreement. The tree with object agreement is shown in (35) for all [Hon] carrying objects.¹⁷

(35)



Since the first probe on the T head, $\phi 1$, gets saturated after obligatory agreement with the subjects, its second probe, $\phi 2$, optionally licenses the objects. Just like the optional object licensing is for the specificity feature in Senaya, in Maithili, it is for the Hon feature, thus giving rise to DOM effects.

Such objects include the 2nd person and 3rd person honorific objects, as shown in (36).

One topic that we have not addressed yet is case marking. That is, as far as case marking is considered, there is no differentiality in either subject or object domain. A list of the nominative and accusative case markers on Maithili pronouns is given in Table 3.

	SUBJECT/NOMINATIVE	OBJECT/ACCUSATIVE
1	<i>həm</i>	<i>həm-ra</i>
2.NH	<i>tō</i>	<i>to-ra</i>
2.MH	<i>tō</i>	<i>to-ra</i>
2.H	<i>əhā</i>	<i>əhā-ke</i>
3.NH	<i>o</i>	<i>ok-ra</i>
3.H	<i>o</i>	<i>hun-ka</i>

Table 3. Nominative and Accusative DPs.

The challenge is: how do accusative case-marked objects remain active for Hon-agreement, despite being marked for case by *v*? As shown in Table 3, all objects are marked accusative, which is also a kind of licensing, and which should effectively make them inactive for further computation, as per the Activity Condition (Chomsky 2000, 2001). We simply assume that while the *v* head licenses the DP for case, fulfilling its case requirement, as per Pesetsky & Torrego (2006), it does not have any uninterpretable Hon features and cannot license the Hon feature on the objects. Therefore, despite being case-valued, the object nominals remain active for Hon licensing. This implies that the Activity Condition does not apply to Maithili. Similar failure of the Activity Condition has been reported in Bantu languages (Carstens 2011; Carstens & Diercks 2013), Nez Perce (Deal 2017), Plains Cree (Oxford 2017), Zulu (Zeller 2006; Halpert 2019), among others.

A last concern is regarding the Phase Impenetrability Condition. According to the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC), *vP* is a phase, and objects should be spelled out with the *vP* once they receive a case and *v*'s features are valued (Chomsky 2000, 2001). Object agreement with *T* can happen only if *vP* is not a phase in Maithili. We present evidence to that effect in the following section.

5.2.1. Maithili vPs are not phases

It is a well-accepted theoretical notion that CPs and *vPs* are phases and *C* and *v* are phase heads (Chomsky 2000, 2001). Once the DPs inside a phase get

case and the phase heads have their uninterpretable features valued, the complements to the phases are spelled out to the interfaces and do not participate in further syntactic computation. This is known as the Phase Impenetrability Condition – (36).

(36) *Phase Impenetrability Condition* (Chomsky 2000)

In phase α with head H, the domain of H is not accessible to operations outside of α , only H and its edge are accessible to such operations.

(36) states the strong version of the PIC. The weak version of the PIC suggests that the complement of the vP phase may remain active in the computation until C, the next phase head, merges into the structure. Once C merges, the complement of v, the object, gets spelled out, but the v head and its specifier, the subject, remain active for further computation – (37).

(37) *Phase Impenetrability Condition* (Chomsky 2001)

The domain of phase head H is not accessible to operations at the next-higher phase ZP; only H and its edge are accessible to such operations.

However, Keine (2017) argues that vP is not a phase in all languages, citing instances of Long Distance Agreement (LDA) from Hindi as evidence. Using similar examples, we show that Maithili does not follow any version of the PIC and that vPs are not phases in the language.

The LDA cases in Maithili, like Hindi, show that embedded objects of a non-finite sentence agree with the matrix finite verb. In (38), the embedded object *hun-ka* (3rd person honorific) in the non-finite sentence triggers agreement with the matrix verb.

- (38) *həm* *[hun-ka marə-lyə]* *chah-əl-iəinh*
 I [s/he.H-ACC hit-INF] want-PST-1 + 3.H
 ‘I wanted to hit him/her(H)’

If PIC was active in Maithili and vP was a phase, we could never get agreement like (38) because the vP containing the embedded verb and the object would be spelled out before the matrix verb would be merged in the structure. LDA is, therefore, ruled out in the stronger version of the PIC.

Note that the weaker version of the PIC may still account for such agreement. The complement of the embedded vP is present in the computational space when matrix v is introduced. Matrix v then probes into the embedded vP and agrees with the embedded object. Interestingly, the number of vPs that can intervene here is infinite. Consider the example in (39), where another layer of non-finite vP merges before the matrix finite verb. In this case, too, the embedded 3rd person honorific object agrees with the matrix verb. This is proof that vPs cannot be phases in Maithili.

- (39) *həm* [*hun-ka* *marə-lyə*] *shuru* *karə-lyə* *chah-əl-iəinh*
 I [s/he.H-ACC hit-INF] start do-INF] want-PST-1 + 3.H
 ‘I wanted to start hitting her/him(H)’

Unlike vPs, CPs are phases in Maithili as objects of an embedded finite clause fail to agree across the CP layer. Consider the example in (40), where the embedded object does not trigger agreement with the matrix verb and only triggers agreement with the embedded finite verb.

- (40) *həm* *soch-əl-iəi/*iəinh* *ki* [*həm* *hun-ka* *mar-b-əinh*]
 I think-PST-1/*1 + 3.H that [I s/he.H-ACC hit-FUT-1 + 3.H]
 ‘I thought that I would hit her/him(H)’

In summary, in this discussion on object agreement, we have shown that first, Hon-encoding objects trigger agreement with the second probe on T. Second, the accusative marked objects remain in the computation due to two reasons: (i) vPs are not phases, so objects do not get spelled out once the vP layer is merged, and (ii) the Activity Condition does not apply to Maithili DPs.

6. Honorificity and micro-variation

So far in this paper, we have discussed the variety of Maithili that is spoken in Darbhanga. Based on the data from this dialect, we have shown that 3rd person honorific subjects and objects differ from 3rd person non-honorific subjects and objects. While the 3rd person honorific is morpho-syntactically marked, the 3rd person non-honorific remains unmarked. In addition, the 1st person pronoun triggers subject agreement, and not object agreement. However, the same patterns have not been reported for other dialects of Maithili. Specifically, we discuss two dialects that have received wider attention in the literature: the Siraha dialect and the Janakpur dialect, both spoken in Nepal. We account for these differences by assuming that the features that give rise to differential marking are subject to parametric variation.

As we show in Table 4, the subject agreement patterns of the Siraha dialect, the Janakpur dialect, and the Darbhanga dialect differ. Table 4 has been formed based on the generalisations that have been made for the Siraha dialect in works such as Yadava *et al.* (2019), Bickel *et al.* (1999), and Yadava (1999), and for the Janakpur dialect in Yadav (1996) and Stump & Yadav (1988). In the subject agreement paradigm, the only difference we see is that the 3rd person non-honorific triggers agreement in the Janakpur dialect but not so in both the Darbhanga and Siraha dialects. This means that while the 3rd person non-honorific remains unmarked in the Siraha dialect, just like the Darbhanga dialect, it is marked in the Janakpur dialect.

SUBJECT AGREEMENT	DARBHANGA DIALECT	SIRAHA DIALECT	JANAKPUR DIALECT
1P	✓	✓	✓
2P.NH	✓	✓	✓
2P.MH	✓	✓	✓
2P.H	✓	✓	✓
3P.NH	✗	✗	✓
3P.H	✓	✓	✓

Table 4. Subject Agreement Differences.

As for the object agreement differences, the literature notes that 3rd person non-honorific and 1st person objects trigger verbal agreement in both Siraha and Janakpur dialects, unlike what we have shown for the Darbhanga dialect.

SUBJECT AGREEMENT	DARBHANGA DIALECT	SIRAHA DIALECT	JANAKPUR DIALECT
1P	✗	✓	✓
2P.NH	✓	✓	✓
2P.MH	✓	✓	✓
2P.H	✓	✓	✓
3P.NH	✗	✓	✓
3P.H	✓	✓	✓

Table 5. Object Agreement Differences.

The agreement differences in Table 4 and Table 5 can be easily explained by assuming that differential marking is subject to parametric variation, as has already been claimed in Kalin (2018). To elaborate, this micro-level parametric variation means that the 3rd person non-honorific subject is default in some dialects but not so in others, just like the difference found between Standard Spanish and the Leista Spanish. Specifically, Darbhanga Maithili shows that honorificity divides the 3rd person into two types: one that is syntactically active and takes part in agreement, namely 3rd person honorific, and one that is syntactically default and does not trigger agreement, namely 3rd person non-honorific. This divide between 3rd person honorific and non-honorific pertains only in the case of subjects in the Siraha dialect and goes away in the object domain. For the Janakpur dialect, the divide does not exist at all.¹⁸

There is, however, more to this story. Yadava *et al.* (2019) note that the secondary agreement controller, the object, in the Siraha variety triggers agreement depending on whether it is focused or not. For example, consider the sentences given in (41), where the unfocused 1st person object does not control agreement in (41a), but when it is focused, it triggers agreement in (41b).

- (41) a. *tu hāmra piṭ-l-æ*
 2.NH I.ACC hit-PST-2.NH
 ‘You(NH) hit me’
 b. *tu hāmra piṭ-l-əhi(k)*
 2.NH I.ACC hit-PST-2.NH + 1
 ‘You(NH) hit me’ (Siraha Maithili, Yadav *et al.* 2019: (47a-b))

No such focus-based agreement is found in the Darbhanga variety. For example, the two morphemes noted in (41), *-æ* and *-əhi*, are also found in the Darbhanga variety, but instead of encoding single versus double agreement, they only encode 2nd person non-honorific subject agreement, as shown in (42). Both morphemes can occur in the same context. While some native speakers could not identify any difference in the contexts when these morphemes are used, some native speakers used *-æ* when the event had happened a long time back in the past and used *-əhi* with an event that had just ended. Irrespective of the aspectual differences that these morphemes might encode, the fact remains unchanged that these markers do not encode a focus-based 1st person object agreement in the Darbhanga variety.

- (42) *tū hām-ra piṭ-l-æ/əhi*
 you.NH I-ACC hit-PST-2.NH
 ‘You(NH) hit me’

Now, coming to the 3rd person object domain, Yadava *et al.* (2019) note that in the Siraha dialect, the 3rd person honorific object agreement is obligatory, but the 3rd person non-honorific object agreement and the 3rd person non-human object agreement are optional, depending on focus. That is, if the 3rd person non-honorific and 3rd person non-human objects are focused, they trigger agreement; 3rd person honorific objects trigger agreement irrespective of focus, as shown in (43-45). As we have shown for Darbhanga Maithili, no such focus-based agreement is found in the context of 3rd person non-honorific object or 3rd person non-human object.

- (43) a. *hām sikshāk-ke piṭ-l-iāinh* (focused/unfocused object)
 I teacher.H-ACC hit-PST-1 + 3.H
 ‘I hit the teacher(H)’
 b. *hām sikshāk-ke *piṭ-l-aū(h)*
 I teacher.H-ACC hit-PST-1
 ‘I hit the teacher(H)’

- (44) a. *həm nokər-ke piṭ-l-iæ(k)* (focused object)
 I servant.NH-ACC hit-PST-1 + 3.NH
 ‘I hit the servant(NH)’
 b. *həm nokər-ke piṭ-l-āū(h)* (unfocused object)
 I servant.NH-ACC hit-PST-1
 ‘I hit the servant(NH)’
- (45) a. *həm kukkur-ke piṭ-l-iæ(k)* (focused object)
 I dog-ACC hit-PST-1 + 3
 ‘I hit the dog’
 b. *həm kukkur-ke piṭ-l-āū(h)* (unfocused object)
 I dog-ACC hit-PST-1
 ‘I hit the dog’ (Siraha Maithili, Yadava *et al.* 2019: 65-66)

As Yadava *et al.* (2019) note, focus turns optional agreement into obligatory agreement in the Siraha dialect. Such a focus-based differential argument marking pattern, although not very common, has been noted in the literature before. For instance, Tournadre (1991) notes that in Central (Lhasa) Tibetan, focused agent arguments receive ergative case, whereas unfocused arguments do not. Not just focus, but other aspects related to the information structure, such as unexpectedness, have also been found to play a role in differential subject/object marking in languages such as Nepali (Schikowski 2013) and Warrwa (McGregor 2006). While explaining the syntax of focus-based differential marking in the Siraha variety of Maithili is outside the scope of this paper, this discussion shows that different features can give rise to differential marking patterns. While focus drives differential marking in Siraha Maithili, honorificity does the same job in Darbhanga Maithili. The Janakpur variety of Maithili, on the other hand, has no such feature-based differential agreement pattern.

In summary, these three varieties of Maithili differ on three grounds: (i) the feature that gives rise to differential agreement patterns, e.g. Hon in Darbhanga Maithili and focus in Siraha Maithili but neither in Janakpur Maithili; (ii) the DPs on which these differential agreement patterns apply, e.g. only 3rd person honorific in Darbhanga Maithili irrespective of position and the 1st person object, but all person/honorific values in Siraha Maithili; and (iii) the syntactic position where the differential marking works, i.e. subject or object, e.g. both subjects and objects show differential agreement pattern in Darbhanga Maithili, whereas only objects show it in Siraha Maithili.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented novel empirical data of differential agreement patterns in Darbhanga Maithili. The data show that in this dialect

of Maithili, the honorificity feature functions as an enabler in allowing the honorific 3rd person to be morpho-syntactically marked on par with 1st and 2nd person pronouns. We therefore claim that this case of differential marking results from the licensing requirement of the Hon feature. Thus, the inventory of enabling features that give rise to differential marking in natural language must also include Hon along with animacy, definiteness, and specificity.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 = 1st, 2nd, 3rd person; ACC = accusative; COMP = complementizer; DAM = Differential Argument Marking; DAT = dative; DO = direct object; DOM = Differential Object Marking; DSM = Differential Subject Marking; EIA = Eastern Indo-Aryan; FOC = focus; GEN = genitive; H = honorific; HH = high-honorific; Hon = honorificity; IO = indirect object; LDA = Long Distance Agreement; MH = mid-honorific; NH = non-honorific; NOM = nominative; OBJ = object; OM = object marking; PCC = Person Case Constraint; PIC = Phase Impenetrability Condition; PL = plural; PRF = perfective; PROG = progressive; PRS = present; PST = past; SG = singular; SBJ = subject; TNS = tense; TR = transitive; $\emptyset$ = default.

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Notes

¹ We use ‘DP’ here to include both 3rd person nouns and pronouns as well as all 1st and 2nd person pronouns. While we are aware of the theoretical implications of choosing DPs over NPs (in the sense of Bošković 2008, 2012), the NP/DP distinction is largely orthogonal to the main topic under discussion here.

² See the list of abbreviations at the end of the paper.

³ Similar data have been reported from multiple other languages (see Anagnostopoulou 2003, 2005, Haspelmath 2004 and Adger & Harbour 2007, among others).

⁴ In most DOM languages, the features responsible for the morphological marking are animacy and definiteness; however, see Naess (2004) for other features such as focus and prominence.

⁵ See Wang (2023) and Wiltschko & Ritter (2024) for a non-syntactic account of honorificity in these languages.

⁶ For the purposes of this paper, we assume honorificity to be a privative feature. However, we refrain from delving deeper into the topic, and making a commitment

about Hon being only a privative feature as opposed to a binary feature. Similarly, we assume person to also be a privative feature, following works such as Harley & Ritter (2002) and Ackema & Neeleman (2018). Just like our assumption about the Hon feature, our assumption about the nature of the person feature is also for the sake of simplicity and motivated by the fact that assuming Hon and person to be privative features suffices in explaining Maithili agreement facts. There can, of course, be other possibilities here.

⁷ Unless specified otherwise, all Maithili examples are from Darbhanga Maithili.

⁸ This is a typical feature of many South Asian languages. Marked subject and object DPs are usually unable to trigger agreement. However, Nepali is a well-known exception as marked ergative subjects trigger agreement in the language (see Chandra & Udaar 2015, and Patel-Grosz 2021 for details and the references cited therein).

⁹ The mid-honorific pronoun is also used by the speaker when addressing a stranger who is younger to them in age. Since they are strangers, it is inappropriate to use the non-honorific pronoun. Additionally, since s/he is younger, there is no obligation to use the honorific pronoun. In situations like these, the use of a mid-honorific pronoun is the safest option.

¹⁰ Maithili also has a fourth layer of honorificity: the high-honorific (HH) pronoun *əpne* which is used for addressing someone formally, such as a high official. However, we do not include it in the paradigm given in (16) because the high-honorific pronoun has no distinct verbal agreement. As we show in (i), the verbal marker for *əpne* is the same as *əhā* which is the honorific pronoun given in (18c). Additionally, *əpne* can be replaced with *əhā*, but *əhā* is not replaced with *əpne*. For example, a high-ranking official in a formal conversation may be addressed using the honorific pronoun *əhā*, but parents are never addressed using the high-honorific pronoun *əpne*. We thank the reviewer for pointing out this missing data point.

- (i) *əpne* *sut-əl* *chh-əl-əūh*
 you.HH sleep-PRF be-PST-2.H
 ‘You(HH) had slept’

¹¹ While we only illustrate with past tense sentences here, the honorificity agreement patterns are consistent with other tenses as well.

¹² In Table 1, we show that the 3rd person subject only triggers agreement for honorificity and not for person, following the general assumption that the 3rd person is not real person; instead, it is the so-called person (Harley & Ritter 2002). The 3rd person receives this name due to it not being a participant in the speech act, unlike the 1st and 2nd person. For the purposes of this paper, we simply adopt the ‘no-person’ terminology from Harley & Ritter’s work and do not go into the details of whether the 3rd person is a real person value or not in Maithili.

¹³ Kalin’s use of the terms ‘obligatory merge’ and ‘optional merge’ is different from its usual definition in generative syntax. She uses ‘merge’ to mean feature merging on heads, in contrast to head-merging to the structure.

¹⁴ As opposed to the imperfective, both specific and non-specific objects fail to trigger agreement in the perfective aspect (i).

- (i) **Axni* *ō* *ksūta* *ksū-lan*
 We that book.F write.PFV-L.1PL

Intended: ‘We wrote that book.’

(Kalin 2018: 12a)

In a perfective sentence, such as (i), where only subjects agree, agreement happens with the T head. Kalin assumes that in Senaya, the perfective Asp head and the v head are not licensors. Thus, no DOM is present in the perfective.

¹⁵ An anonymous reviewer points out that instead of nominal licensing, relativized probing, as proposed in different flavors in Nevins (2007), Bejar & Rezac (2009) and Preminger (2011, 2014), can explain Maithili agreement better. Relativized probing stands for the idea that the probe looks for a goal with a particular feature and does

not agree with the nearest goal if that feature is not available. For Maithili, however, we have two probes on one head, instead of a single head that would undergo relativized probing. Out of these two probes, the subject probe becomes a problem for the relativized probing account. Since subject agreement happens for both person and honorificity (see (30-31)), we cannot suggest that probe 1, ϕ_1 , uses relativized probing as it agrees with 1st person for only person, 2nd person for both person and honorificity, and 3rd person for only honorificity. We concur that the reviewer's suggestion about relativized probing explains object agreement as probe 2, ϕ_2 , only agrees with Hon-carrying objects. So, in the case of object, we could say that the probe only looks for Hon feature and therefore, it is a case of relativized probing. However, keeping the onus of agreement on the Hon-carrying goals, i.e. they must be licensed, explains both the DSM and DOM pattern in Maithili without resorting to two different mechanisms, which is why we opt for this account.

¹⁶ Note, unlike subject agreement, we have not mentioned the object agreement morphemes because they are fused together as a portmanteau morpheme with the subject agreement morpheme. This means that there is no purely object agreement morpheme in Maithili.

¹⁷ An anonymous reviewer points out that the restrictions on object agreement could also result from morphological constraints. In other words, all objects trigger person and honorificity agreement but only some features are realized. This would essentially mean that no exceptional licensing of honorificity carrying objects is required in the language. In defence of the licensing account, we present examples of complementary distribution between allocutive and object agreement in Maithili to show that the objects are indeed licensed by the second probe on the T head.

Maithili is an allocutive agreement triggering language where the athematic addressee of the sentence also triggers verbal agreement. When allocutive agreement takes place, it suppresses object agreement. Consider the example given in (ia) where the agreement is shown for the subject as well as the object, for a sentence that is not addressed to anyone; we call this the neutral context. When the same sentence is addressed to a friend, the agreement is controlled by the subject and the addressee, not the object, as shown for the non-honorific addressee in (ib):

- | | | | | | |
|--------|----------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| (i) a. | <i>hām</i> | <i>hun-ka</i> | <i>dekh-ne</i> | <i>chh-əl-iāinh</i> | (neutral context) |
| | I | s/he.H-ACC | see-PRF | be-PST-1 + 3.H | |
| | 'I had seen her/him' | | | | |
| b. | <i>hām</i> | <i>hun-ka</i> | <i>dekh-ne</i> | <i>chh-əl-iāu</i> | (said to a friend) |
| | I | s/he.H-ACC | see-PRF | be-PST-1 + ALLOC.NH | |
| | 'I had seen her/him' | | | | |

This complementarity indicates that the two kinds of agreement are controlled by the same head which at any given point, may agree either with the object or the addressee. A morphological account would instead hold that object agreement would happen obligatorily with the constraints on realisation applying post-syntactically.

The complementary distribution between allocutive and object agreement shows that there are contexts where object licensing fails to take place, much like the Senaya cases mentioned in Kalin (2014, 2018). The failure of object licensing in these cases provides evidence for the syntactic licensing in non-allocutive agreement cases.

¹⁸ A reviewer points out that Maithili not only has object agreement, but also possessor agreement. We find ourselves unable to include a detailed account of possessor agreement in the current paper as the topic requires a close inspection, that lies outside the scope of the current paper. However, preliminary observations about the syntax of possessor agreement in Darbhanga Maithili have been noted in Kumari & Chandra (2022) and Kumari (2023). They note that the differential object agreement pattern is also true for possessors. Specifically, just like objects, 3rd person non-honorific and 1st person possessors do not control agreement in Darbhanga Maithili.

Only 3rd person honorific and 2nd person (all values) control possessor agreement. The pattern of secondary agreement in Darbhanga Maithili, therefore is this: any secondary controller that does not encode honorificity, i.e. 1st person, or encodes a default value of honorificity, i.e. 3rd person non-honorific, fails to control secondary agreement. This includes the objects, possessors as well as dative subjects. Due to space constraints in this paper, i.e. focus on differential subject and object agreement, the readers are kindly directed to read these works.

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